

Louisiana Coastal Area Study

Spring 2004

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is the status of the LCA Comprehensive Study?

A: Since 2000, LCA planning has been coordinated extensively between the state and federal government. Beginning in March 2002, the Corps and the State of Louisiana (sponsor) began a cooperative interagency study effort to develop a comprehensive plan to restore Louisiana's coastal ecosystem. The purpose of that study was to develop a comprehensive plan that would form a blueprint for the construction of projects for ecosystem restoration of the coastal wetlands of Louisiana. During that study effort, the general public, stakeholder interest groups, and technical experts from academia and federal agencies engaged in the scoping, formulation and definition of the final array of restoration alternatives. The study efforts resulted in production of the draft Louisiana Coastal Area Comprehensive Coastwide Ecosystem Restoration study report and Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (DPEIS). The report and DPEIS identified an array of seven coastwide alternatives that would provide a sustainable coastal ecosystem with the essential functions, assets, and values of the natural ecosystem.

In 2003, the LCA study team presented and received comments on the Subprovince restoration alternatives, an array of comprehensive restoration plans, the process

being developed to select a comprehensive coastwide ecosystem restoration plan, and the method used to determine the cost effectiveness of each one of the alternatives considered.

Q: What has happened between October 2003 and April 2004?

A: The Administration directed a revised and refocused course of action.

In October 2003 the Corps submitted a report package to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ). Those Administration entities reviewed the draft report package and PDEIS and deferred their public release. OMB and CEQ provided formal comments to the Corps in the form of the FY 05 President's Budget Guidance, released on February 2, 2004.

The Corps was directed to refocus from the larger comprehensive ecosystem restoration plan to a near-term plan that presents the first 10-year or so increment of highly cost effective restoration projects targeting critical need areas.

The Corps and the state will continue to work together on determining a near-term ecosystem restoration plan for coastal Louisiana. Since receipt of the Administration's guidance, the

Frequently Asked Questions(Continued)

Corps and the state have been engaged in dialogue to forge a cooperative course of action that is responsive to the Administration's guidance.

Q: What will a Near-Term Plan involve?

A: The Administration is particularly interested in the first 10 years of coastal restoration in Louisiana. Specifically, the Administration has directed the Corps of Engineers to determine what the critical ecosystem restoration opportunities are that require immediate attention over the next 5 - 10 years, what large-scale studies may be required, highlight the key long-term scientific uncertainties and engineering challenges, and what demonstration projects would be involved. The plan will reflect critical ecosystem restoration opportunities that will be based on sound restoration practices, will be supported by sound science and technology and will address many concerns voiced by the public and other stakeholders.

Q: What is the sponsor's position on the Administration's instruction for the Corps to focus on the Near-Term?

A: The sponsor supports developing a clear roadmap for the near-term.

Q: What are the potential effects of the Administration's budget guidance?

A: The Administration's Guidance has reset the schedule and involves initiating a new NEPA process.

Prior to the release of the February 2, 2004 guidance, the Corps was working towards concluding the on-going NEPA process addressing a Comprehensive Plan in time to complete a Chief's Report by June 2004. A Chief's Report is a necessary step to support the inclusion of the development of the Near-term Restoration Plan as a funded action item in the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) legislation currently pending in Congress.

Since the revised Administration guidance issued on February 2, 2004 changed the focus of the study, the Corps is now working to start and complete the required NEPA public review process focusing on a near-term plan no later than June 30, 2004, and completing a Chief's Report in December 2004. Failure to meet that schedule can be expected to jeopardize needed future funding.